

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-20

INFO OCT-01 ADP-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 INR-10 NSAE-00 PA-03

RSC-01 USIA-15 PRS-01 PM-07 CAB-09 COME-00 EB-11

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R 291747Z AUG 73

FM AMEMBASSY PANAMA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8397

INFO USSOUTHCOM

PAN CANAL

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EO 11652: N/A

TAGS: ETRN, PN

SUBJ: POSSIBLE CLOSING OF TOCUMEN AIRPORT FOR REPAIRS

BEGIN UNCLASSIFIED

SUMMARY: LOCAL PRESS PUBLISHED STATEMENT THAT TOCUMEN INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT MAY HAVE TO CLOSE FOR RESURFACING BY END OF YEAR OR EARLY 1974 AND THAT CANAL ZONE WOULD BE REQUESTED TO PROVIDE ALTERNATE FACILITIES SHOULD THIS BECOME NECESSARY. END OF SUMMARY

1. BOTH PRINCIPAL MORNING SPANISH LANGUAGE DAILIES, MATUTINO AND LA ESTRELLA AND THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE SISTER NEWSPAPER OF THE LATTER GAVE FRONT PAGE COVERAGE TO A STATEMENT BY DIRECTOR GENERAL OF CIVIL AVIATION JUAN ABAD THAT HE IS GREATLY CONCERNED THAT OPERATION AT TOCUMEN INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT MAY HAVE TO BE SUSPENDED TEMPORARILY BECAUSE OF DETERIORATION OF THE RUNWAY. HE ATTRIBUTED THE PROBLEM TO THE ABSENCE OF ANY KIND OF MAINTENANCE DURING THE LAST TEN YEARS.

2. ABAD STATED THAT, AFTER A STUDY OF RUNWAY CONDITION,
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REPAIR WORK WAS INITIATED AND THAT CONSTRUCTION OF A

DRAINAGE SYSTEM TO AVOID FLOODING HAS ALREADY BEEN COMPLETED. HE ADDED THAT PLANS INCLUDE ASPHALT REPAVING OF THE ENTIRE THREE THOUSAND METER LONG AND 60 METER WIDE RUNWAY BY NEXT SUMMER (DECEMBER-MARCH IN PANAMA).

3. ABAD SAID THAT, ALTHOUGH EVERY EFFORT WILL BE MADE TO AVOID INTERRUPTION OF NORMAL OPERATIONS, IF IT SHOULD BE NECESSARY TO SUSPEND OPERATIONS, PERMISSION TO USE ONE OF THE CANAL ZONE AIRPORTS WOULD BE SOLICITED, PERHAPS VIA THE FOREIGN MINISTRY. HE ASSURED THAT CANAL ZONE AIRFIELD FACILITIES WOULD BE ADEQUATE TO CONVENIENTLY ACCOMMODATE THE HIGH LEVEL OF AIR TRAFFIC THROUGH PANAMA AND THAT AIRLINES USING TOCUMEN WOULD BE GIVEN ADEQUATE NOTICE.

4. BEGIN LOU: CIVIL AVIATION AUTHORITIES HAD HOPED THAT WORK ON THE NEW TOCUMEN AIRPORT WOULD BE COMPLETED BEFORE EXTENSIVE RENOVATION OF THE OLD RUNWAY WOULD BECOME NECESSARY. HOWEVER, THE WORLD BANK RECENTLY ESTIMATED THAT WORK ON NEW AIRPORT IS SIX MONTHS BEHIND SCHEDULE AND THAT DELAYS WOULD INCREASE TO A YEAR IF PROMPT ACTION IS NOT TAKE,. A LOCAL FAA OFFICIAL INFORMED THE EMBASSY THAT HOWARD AIR FORCE BASE IN THE ZONE WOULD BE CONSIDERED IF AN ALTERNATE AIRPORT SHOULD BECOME NECESSARY AND THAT CIVIL AVIATION AUTHORITIES BELIEVE THA THE 1949 AVIATION AGREEMENT PROVIDES THE GOP WITH THE RIGHT TO USE CZ AIR FACILITIES.
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